

Continuity of School Operations  
During COVID-19 Closure



Distance Learning Program Expansion  
in the Furtherance of Charter Fulfillment  
and  
COVID-19 Crisis Management

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*New behaviors; same skills, attitudes and dispositions*

As an Edgenuity school with a VMware environment, a student information system linked to Google for Education and all teachers and students trained in the use of software supporting e-learning, VGV is in a supreme position to ensure continuity of teaching and learning during this current crisis.

VGV, by charter, is an Edgenuity school with a distance learning management system as its sole curriculum. VGV's essential research question as an R&D charter school, founded in 2013 at RIDE's request, was simply, "Can a district take a stand-alone LMS designed for home schooling and other special purposes and make it the sole curriculum in an all e-learning and bricks and mortar environment?" Originally designed as a "Common Core delivery platform, rolled out in a PARCC testing center," VGV began operations in 2013 and has successfully answered that research question with documented achievement as highlighted in Inventing School (Butler & Pilkington 2016).

In fact, this current opportunity to engage in crisis management has given VGV an opportunity to expand our program in support of greater charter fulfillment. Formerly, the "virtuality" of the school's program was found in the curriculum and not the student experience. To describe the school, we were often referred to as, "Phoenix University for kids, but you have to go to school." Many in the beginning were under the misunderstanding that VGV would decrease the number of teachers working at the school, that the students would engage in solitary and anti-social behaviors and that attendance would not be a significant priority for the students and families. In truth, because of those early and unfounded criticisms, VGV went in the opposite direction and enjoys a 1:10 teacher to student ratio, is replete with human interaction and enjoys an attendance rate commensurate with bricks and mortar text-based schools.

In 2010, Digital Learning Now! (Bush & Wise, 2010) created a data visualization graph which showed the relative "virtuality" of schools. Poles were comparatively represented in the graph by depicting schools which were 100% online (without any brick and mortar component) to schools which were 100% offline with traditional brick and mortar facilities. VGV purposefully positioned itself in the center; 100% on-line curriculum housed in a brick and mortar facility. This was done to not only rebuff criticism of the model, but to ensure a humanistic and physical teacher-centric model for our students and families.

Important to note, A Personalized Learning Framework for Non-thematic Pathways (Butler & Pilkington, 2017) describes in detail the personalization efforts at VGV regarding curricular customization. Our sixteen pathways create a Learner Experience, or LX, which considers a student's diagnostic assessment data and Lexile level when the school creates their pathway. No student is given work which they are unable to attempt. We call this mindset the "Learning Stretch and not the Learning Leap." Students are challenged, but not in a way where the material itself is the greatest challenge. The challenge we enjoy is in how to think about and use information all while increasing their literacy and numeracy skills. Because each student is "met where they are at," our distance learning plan has a greater chance of success when rolled out asynchronously. It is inevitable that during this crisis, more independent work will be done than ever before by students across the nation. At VGV, we know that the students are familiar and facile with the LMS platform, and they are using curricular material which has been previously personalized for them.

This current crisis gives to VGV a new opportunity to expand our brand of e-learning. Our mission statement, which was drafted as part of the VGV 2006 charter school application, stands as relevantly today under the COVID-19 crisis as it did in 2006 or 2013. At VGV, we believe that ...

*The Village Green exists to advance individualized education and family choice by maximizing technology, creating community, reshaping teaching and redefining school.*

**Maximizing technology:** The shift away from a bricks and mortar facility means that there will be a heavier reliance on asynchronous learning than ever before. Our LMS will now be a tool where the physical teacher is supportive on a remote basis but through videoconferencing. The video teacher now has an elevated status and for us that is a new circumstance.

**Creating Community:** This is the greatest challenge within this new work. The teachers will be critical to this endeavor. Students must “hang out” in the Hangout. Teachers must talk to parents more. Kids will have to feel connected during times of acute disconnect. Keeping the community alive and spirits high is the most critical of tasks.

**Reshaping teaching:** Teachers at VGV are already expert in the use of an all-digital curriculum and the software and management tools needed to execute the school model. Bringing it on-line in a 100% digital format is a new behavior. While we are very much a school which uses Google well, the method of organizing student work through a remote means such as videoconferencing is a new behavior which we must master with great haste.

**Redefining school:** The school which redefined the learner experience in RI must now return to the roots it never had and do true distance learning. Teachers must use their skills in new ways to engage students and to keep learning happening. Administration must also develop new behaviors in managing people remotely. The crisis management which we are currently engaging in calls for a set of skills which the field thought we were aiming to establish initially, however, they are in fact new to VGV as they are new to all of us.

#### *For the Current Closure*

Continuity of school operations, including Duty of Care, is our top priority. The following work guide is a template for the flow of activity which will occur commencing on March 23, 2020. All individuals involved (students, families, faculty and support personnel) are facile with our e-learning tools. What is paramount currently, is a cohesive document which delineates expectations and action as VGV moves from a brick and mortar virtual school to a totally internet-based learning organization. That is the sole purpose of this document.

#### **Teaching and Learning:**

**LMS:** Edgenuity dashboards for students remain open 24/7/365, however, the calendar has been set to pause for the week of vacation, March 16 to 20, 2020. The calendar will be re-set to standard schooldays on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and thus curriculum completion rates as gauged by the LMS will resume. This is critical as the calendar and the pace of each course are linked and is the chief measure of student progress.

Every student has a dashboard in Edgenuity which contains all their coursework and metrics. This dashboard guides their work and their progress. It is completely transparent in that faculty and

parents can view the dashboard. Students are aware of their courses, percent complete within each course, their current proficiency rate within each course and a plan to balance their workload so that each course is in “Green” and not “Yellow” or “Red.” Students are aware of whether they are “Behind,” “On target,” or “Ahead” in each course on their dashboard.

Physical teachers can approve readiness for assessments. This is an on-line capability which is used daily. Physical teachers can communicate with students within the platform.

Video teachers are state-certified and highly qualified teachers, employed by Edgenuity, who give e-instruction within the LMS. Video teachers are an essential part of the LMS in that their asynchronous instruction is the activity which serves as a springboard to the reinforcement work and assessments of every lesson. Typically, the physical teacher at VGV extends the work of the video teacher in a one-on-one or small group environment. In the non-bricks and mortar iteration of VGV, physical teachers will shift methods and use on-line meeting space to provide small group and individual assistance.

Session and action logs are provided by Edgenuity, in Excel format, to provide detailed information on all student and teacher activity within the LMS. There is complete transparency within the LMS regarding all on-line activity. In-house data snapshots are companioned with session and activity logs to provide a complete picture of work accomplished during the closure. Records such as activities completed, reinforcers completed, assessments taken and teacher action within the LMS is all time and date stamp with an Excel record.

**Videoconferencing:** VGV is a Google for Education school and all teachers and students use Google Hangouts. Our student and teacher emails are vgvirtual.org and are used daily by each in support of the work done within the LMS. Teachers have an employer supplied vgcs.org email for business purposes as Google has an element of control over the emails associated with the use of its products. Students do not use the vgcs.org as that is reserved for business communication. However, vgvirtual.org is ubiquitously used by all to support teaching and learning.

**Teacher Teams:** All VGV teachers are the member of a core-content team of teachers serving between 35 and 50 students in total. Teacher teams are pivotal in student support and collegial execution of the model. Together, they plan independently as teams on how to keep their students on target or ahead. VGV is a school with essentially five internal and stand-alone teacher teams. Teacher teams will meet though videoconferencing to strategize on how to best serve and keep their students on target.

**Advisory:** Advisories will play a central role in the dissemination of information and troubleshooting areas where intervention is needed. All teachers are advisors with between 8 and 12 advisees assigned to them. Advisors have updated and real time contact information and will be the main point of contact between the students and the school regarding schedules and expectations. It is unlikely, however aspirational, that teachers will hold Hangouts simultaneously with all 35 to 50 students on their team’s roster.

**Schedules:** While it is possible for a VGV student to work totally independently, and the LMS is designed to be used in a vacuum such as home schooling, it is preferable that teachers and students meet in the Hangout to discuss issues, receive instructional support and continue to have a sense of

school connection. Each team is responsible for setting a Hangout schedule for their courses. Publication of the schedule will occur in the file sharing element of Google for Education and Google Docs. It is important to state that VGV teacher teams have pre-established Workshop groups and schedules for meeting while in the bricks and mortar environment. A new set of schedules will have to be produced by the teams in order to facilitate the distance learning.

Currently, VGV students spend 60% of their school day on-line in the LMS and 40% of their school day in workshop with the physical teacher. Our goal is to shift that from 60/40 to 50/50. In other words, VGV aspires to have students work independently in Edgenuity for three hours per day and to be involved with other students and teachers within the videoconferencing environment for the other three hours per day. This is an ambitious goal but critical to the concept of continuity of community.

A sample of a student’s day may look like this:

Time	Activity	Group, workshop or Individual
8:45	AM check-in by videoconference	By advisory, group
9:00	Independent history work	individual
10:00	Videoconference on math	workshop
11:00	Independent ELA	individual
12:00	Lunch/break	individual
1:00	Videoconference on science	workshop
2:00	Independent work in science	individual
3:00	PM check-in by videoconference	By advisory, group
3:15 or afterschool	Homework within the LMS	individual

The teacher teams will strive to provide balance of time; with independence vs. videoconference balanced to provide instruction and guidance in all areas daily.

**Special Populations:** VGV has twenty-five students with Individual Education Plans and two special education resource teachers. The teachers of special education students at VGV are extraordinarily dedicated to their students and families. Special education at VGV is not simply an academic division within the LEA but rather a family led by professionals who view their work as a calling and solemn obligation. Under the guidance of the Special Education Administrator, the Academic Support Center professionals will be in daily contact with all their students and families to ensure that any needed accommodations or modifications are enacted by the regular education personnel. The LMS has already been customized for each student’s Lexile level, however, this does not mean that special education students are on independent cruise-control within the platform. Assistance to our IEP students is critical and the ratio of 1:13 teachers to students will allow the teachers to be efficacious in their outreach.

**Multi-language Learners:** Our MLL teacher works similarly to the special education teachers in that there is a low student to teacher ratio, she is ultra-passionate and protective of their students and that they are very communicative with their families. Our Edgenuity platform is completely customizable by Lexile and has embedded features such as text to speech and translation tools. The MLL teachers will

also be checking in daily and planning Hangout sessions with students to support them in their e-courseware.

**College Counseling:** VGV has a full time College and Career Transition Specialist who will continue her work with our Seniors and Three-Year Grads. Using the communication tools previously cataloged she will be in daily contact with her caseload.

**Faculty meetings:** Head of School Rochelle Baker, MSW, M.Ed., will be the point person for the data team to produce daily or weekly dashboard snapshots as well as session and action logs from the LMS. Dissemination of analyzed data regarding who is, and who isn't, making and keeping progress will be her chief responsibility during the closure.

**Assessments and Reports to parents:** VGV distributes ten academic report cards and ten 21<sup>st</sup> Century report cards per year. For the duration of the closure that schedule will be accelerated to bi-weekly reports. In order to keep parents informed, and students on track, it is more important than ever to maintain a timely feedback loop of status reports to the families. Edgenuity data is available on the student's dashboard and in the parent portal in real time. However, there is no substitution for an official school report card to evidence success or failure on the academic side. Additionally, each team must delineate how their 40% of the non-Edgenuity gradebook is aligned to promote success in this distance learning experiment. Formerly, the 40% was teacher discretion. It is now very important that teams support each other and their students by gearing the non-Edgenuity portion of their gradebook to the distance learning initiative created by the COVID-19 crisis management.

**Communication systems:** Alma, Google for Education and Hangouts will be the primary sources of communication. Alma allows for robocalls, texts and emails to the entire school community. Hangout has videoconferencing capacity.

**Social Supports:** Continuity of Operations means providing for the community's needs with regard to basic services such as food, emotional/social needs, access to technology, nursing services and school basics such as providing for a secure electronic environment, attendance taking and the delivery of print materials to families experiencing difficulties with connectivity.

**Food:** Although VGV will be providing breakfast and lunch from the school facility to our students only, and recording their participation via the Mealtime software program, we applied to become a summer-time location as per the request of the school lunch division of the Department. Partnering with Revolutions Food, and centralizing operations to the VGV campus with our sister school Charette, we are prepared to distribute food five days a week. Monday and Wednesday will be the main delivery days; however, we will distribute food five days per week. The items are unitized and shelf stable and the application was sent to RIDE on 3/18/20. The school community has been alerted to the Rev Foods/VGV/Charette plan.

**MSW services:** VGV's MSW (the Director of Student Services) serves students who require in-school counseling. She will be available Monday through Friday from 8:45 to 3:15 for videoconferencing via Hangout for students who require this service for both their IEP and for general needs of anxiety and other reasons.

**Attendance:** VGV's LMS time and date stamps all activity. Attendance will be taken through the LMS as well as teachers making a record of videoconferencing participation. However, our system's ability to

monitor activity will be the official record used for attendance for accountability. This data is third party generated and then downloaded by the school. Edgenuity records all activity in the session and action logs.

**Safe internet environment:** As a VMware school, our students have view.vgcs.org as a secure portal which brings them into our server where their VGV desktop becomes their remote desktop. During this time the students have access to all their stored files as well as their Office tools. When in VMware View, students have complete protection regarding content filtering, virus protection and malware protection. VMware View provides a safe internet experience for students while they are working on school supported work.

**Access to technology:** Edgenuity is NIMAS 2004 compliant with backward design capacity. In other words, everything in Edgenuity (instructional lessons, reinforcers, quizzes, tests and cumulative exams) can be converted to print materials. For families who do not have internet capacity, we are able to deliver physical print materials which can be completed and assessed in hard copy. The school has the capacity to deliver Chrome Books to families, however, the solution to connectivity issues is more profound and is impacting the entire educational sector. Currently, VGV has six families without email access. Many families have internet at home but lack Chrome Books. That situation is an easier fix than the lack of internet. Following the guidance, and public/private industry trends on this rapidly evolving issue, we hopefully will have 100% digital access for our students as opposed to the current estimate of 97%.

### *Personnel*

It is without question that it is the work of the teachers which will make this distance learning experiment a success or failure. VGV is in a luxurious position with our low teacher to student ratio. We are in a luxurious position with our ample technology. We are in a luxurious position with a fully acculturated distance learning curriculum being in place as the district's sole curriculum for seven years. As an R&D charter school, we stretched the limits of what can happen when a school is designed to be "textbook-less." Our students are all able e-learners and there is nothing in this experiment which is a new facet for us on the curricular side. Where we will fail or succeed is in the robust connections the teachers keep with their students.

**Administration:** The school's situation room will be manned by the Superintendent, Principal, Director of Teaching, Learning and Research, Special Ed & MLL Administrator, Data Manager and alternately the Director of Student Life and the Director of Student Services. It is our job to keep the flow of information steady and to monitor and assist those in the field. Many back end Edgenuity, Google and Alma tasks will be performed hourly and daily to keep the new system from becoming frustrating for teachers and students. Dashboards and customizations will need constant care. New courses and new modules will have to be created. There is a heavy lift on the back end of all the e-learning tools.

**Teachers:** The primary contact for all students are their teachers. The expectation is that teachers work a full day, every day. They must not only coordinate with each other as teams but with their advisories and with their students in their respective subjects. Teachers also are critical in the feedback loop to Administration regarding the troubleshooting of issues which pop up. Teachers need tools and permissions to adjust the curriculum on the fly. Problems that could be easily worked out while face-to-

face are now arduous. Accommodations must be made by administration to not fetter the teachers in their work with the students, we have a high-quality and rigorous curriculum and maintenance of Esprit de Corps is now a huge part of the teacher's job description. Of primary importance is the team's ability to produce and execute videoconferenced workshops and advisories.

It is critical that teachers keep logs, or diaries, of their activities with students, modifications to e-courseware and outreach to parents. Cataloging activity will gauge the level of interaction and will form the basis of a comparative metric between an in-school experience and a distance one.

Support personnel: Our school secretary and operational aide are critical in helping parents. Our school secretary routes calls and communication and serves as the translator. She is very important in assisting parents with questions and answers. Our Operational Aide will assist Revolution Foods in the distribution of foodstuffs to families. She too is fluent in Spanish and is critical to our successful communication with parents in a familiar and friendly way.

PLU's and Frontline: All efforts will be made to offer PD modules, and to wrap up evaluations, in an expedient manner. Many teachers at VGV have certification renewal pending and it is the school's obligation to avail opportunities to our teachers.

#### *Challenges and work prior to March 23, 2020*

Field test with faculty their connections with Google Hangout: While faculty use this tool, it is used sparingly or inconsistently. On Friday the 20<sup>th</sup>, VGV needs to get everyone online together to make sure that all our teachers have active and glitch-free connections. It is anticipated that this will be successful, however, VGV has never brought all its teachers together in a "Hangout."

Communication with teachers, parents and students: The superintendent will write letters to each stakeholder constituency describing in detail our plans, the importance of effort in this distance learning experiment and the critical role we each play in keeping both our school community connection, and teaching and learning, together in a supportive and caring manner. The messaging language, tone and voice found in each letter will vary depending on the audience.

Delivery of Food and FSMC support: Certainly, REV Foods is in crisis management mode as well. They need our assistance with logistics like never before. VGV must attempt to make their work more efficacious for the benefit of both VGV and Charette families. VGV administration must be more hands on than ever and this includes sourcing items and consumables for Rev Foods which they do not have the ability to do for themselves.

Logs: Formatted templates, or ALMA protocols, must be devised for teachers to keep accurate records of their activities.

Helpdesk: VGV's data manager is to create a helpdesk to deal with tech glitches and problems which occur in the field.

Gradebook: The teacher portion of 40% must be standardized by team. Teacher professional evaluative judgment has been the driver of the 40% and that system doesn't allow for the clarity we need at this time.

## *Summation*

Village Green Virtual's performance envelope regarding Edgenuity metrics is well established. We are acutely aware of the amount of activities performed each day by each student, as well as their proficiency rates, course completion rates and pace of work rates. The numbers we are capable of have been long established. VGV is a school which lives in its own data. If need be, we can count keystrokes per day per student. VGV can assess idle time while a student is logged into our LMS. We know how we perform within the virtualized "bricks and mortar" curricular environment.

However, we are in a new situation and the research question is:

*Can VGV hold to the same level of curricular completion, and establish functioning digital social cohorts of students, while executing its model outside of a "brick and mortar" environment?*

The litmus test of our success in this experiment will be in the numbers. Are we able to maintain the same level of teaching and learning during a crisis as we are while school is in session? The answer will be quantifiable in that our snapshots, action and session logs and rates of student progress are transparent. It is VGV's hope that as an R&D charter school we can provide our Rhode Island colleagues with a new model on how to execute a full school program while physically not in school. No LEA is as well positioned as VGV to take on this challenge and to create a new guidebook for traditional districts. The statutory purpose of charter schools is being actualized during this crisis in a more profound manner than at any other time in our movement's twenty-five-year history. Village Green Virtual is proud to be placed in this circumstance.